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FIRST DESCRIPTION OF THE NEST OF THE CHESTNUT-TAILED ANTBIRD

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ABSTRACT.—Here I describe for the first time nests of the Chestnut-tailed Antbird (*Myrmeciza hemimelaena*) in Bolivia. I found two nests in the understory of tropical lowland and hill tropical forests. The nests, 25 and 28 cm above ground, were basally supported open cups with a curved *Geonoma* sp. palm leaf as the structural foundation, woven with pieces of brown stringy rootlets, dead leaves, and leaf exoskeletons. *Received 25 July 2001, accepted 26 March 2002.*

The Neotropical family Thamnophilidae (Sibley and Alquist 1990, Sibley and Monroe 1990) is large, yet relatively poorly known (Ridgely and Tudor 1994), and nests, eggs, and nestlings of most species are undescribed (Wilkinson and Smith 1997). Here I describe for the first time the nests, eggs, and nestlings of the Chestnut-tailed Antbird (*Myrmeciza hemimelaena*) from sites in eastern Bolivia. *M. hemimelaena* is a resident of humid forest undergrowth, predominantly in the Southern Amazonia and the lower Central Andes zoogeographic regions, with a less common occurrence in the southeastern region of Northern Amazonia (Stotz et al. 1996). *Myrmeciza* is a heterogeneous and probably polyphyletic genus, and *M. hemimelaena* belongs to a group of smaller, strongly patterned and usually more colorful species (Ridgely and Tudor 1994).

M. hemimelaena is one of the more common tropical forest understory antbirds in Bolivia (ABH pers. obs.). It often is the last remaining forest antbird species in the most southerly remnants of the Amazonian avifaunal community in Bolivia (ABH pers. obs.). Vocalizations and plumages of *M. hemimelaena* have been described (Meyer de Schauensee 1970, Willis 1985, Ridgely and Tudor 1994, Mayer 2000) and recorded vocalizations (songs, contact and alarm calls) have been archived by the author (MLNS 101829 and 101702, Macauley Library of Natural Sounds, Cornell Univ.); however its nest has not been described previously.

I found the first nest at 900 m (15° 06′ S, 67° 32′ W) in the Pilón Lajas Biosphere Reserve and Communal Lands on the northern slope of Serranía Beu (peak at 1,600 m), Provincia Franz Tamayo, Dept. La Paz. The vegetation of the area is hill tropical humid forest (Stotz et al. 1996). I found the second nest at 290 m (14° 33′ S, 67° 43′ W), in Madidi National Park, Provincia Franz Tamayo, Dept. La Paz, between the Tuichi and Hondo rivers. The area is mature, lower tropical humid forest between Serranía Bala (800 m) and Serranía Eslabón (2,000 m). I found both nests during bird surveys by unintentionally flushing the birds from their nests. Each female sat quietly on her nest until startled, then flew 4–5 m off and gave alarm calls.

Both nests were open cups basally supported by a curved *Geonoma* sp. palm leaf, which also served as the nest's structural foundation. They were attached at the side to one object, but supported from underneath. I found the first nest during incubation on 21 September 1998 and a female flushed once daily (11:00–14:00 EST) to 25 September. The nest originally had been beside the basal stalk of a tree fern, hidden underneath its lower frond. The stalk had been cut during trail maintenance, exposing the nest (Fig. 1). The nest (7.5 cm high, 12 cm in diameter; Fig. 2) was on a small ledge 25 cm above ground on a vertical bank. Below the nest was a disused hole 11 cm in diameter. The nest rested on debris and was attached by one side to forest litter and roots projecting from the earth. The inside had pieces of brown stringy rootlets and two leaf exoskeletons. The outside was mainly strips of palm leaf with dead leaves and some rootlets.

On 2 March 2001 I located the second nest (6 cm high, 10.5 cm in diameter), after flushing the female, exposing two nestlings. It was

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FIG. 1. Exposed nest of Chestnut-tailed Antbird (*Myrmeciza hemimelaena*) at Serranía Beu, Pilón Lajas Biosphere Reserve and Communal Lands on 23 September 1998. Photograph by A. B. Hennessey.

FIG. 2. Nest with two eggs of Chestnut-tailed Antbird (*Myrmeciza hemimelaena*) at Serranía Beu, Pilón Lajas Biosphere Reserve and Communal Lands on 23 September 1998. Photograph by A. B. Hennessey.

28 cm above ground on a discarded dead palm leaf that had fallen over a thin sapling (1.5 m high). Like the first nest, the nest was basally supported by a structural foundation of a single curved dead *Geonoma* sp. palm leaf, with small dead leaves and thin strips of palm leaf woven into a circle. The nest was attached to the sapling stalk with the same material.

The clutch and brood size for the first and second nests, respectively, were two. The eggs were pyriform to long-pyriform (2 cm long, 1.4 cm in diameter) cream-white, with lengthwise faint, thin, pink scrawls, concentrated toward the blunt end (Fig. 2). The nestlings were purplish blue, without down. They were inactive and had closed eyes.

The antbirds I observed created basally supported nests, but placed them above the ground. This possibly demonstrates the evolution of an ancestral ground-nesting trait in response to predation pressure. In future observations it will be important to note if the nests are above ground and basally supported by a palm leaf that functions as its structural foundation. Additional information on the nests of other species may aid our comprehension of the taxonomy and evolutionary history of this genus and the Thamnophilidae.

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